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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: ARMY CHIEF SPEAKS OUT

Classified By: DCM Geeta Pasi, reason para. 1.4 d.

11. (C) Summary. The army chief's populist, politician-bashing speech yesterday has boosted rumors he intends to become president once the incumbent's term expires in September. End Summary.

#### The General Speaks Out

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12. (SBU) On March 27, Chief of Army Staff General Moeen Uddin Ahmed told a group of Independence War veterans that Bangladesh's politicians have completely failed the country, being unable to agree even on who deserved to be recognized as "father of the country." He blasted politicians as corrupt and divisive, and said, "The time has come to reunite the country and try to deliver the benefits of independence." There would be no relaxation, he vowed, in the campaign against corruption, injustice, and thuggery.

13. (SBU) Moeen hailed Awami League patriarch Sheikh Mujib as the "father of the country," characterized the last Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government as particularly corrupt, proposed funding a hospital for the poor with the auction proceeds of luxury vehicles seized from the corrupt, and agreed to consider a request from the audience to prosecute Independence-era war criminals.

14. (SBU) The military, Moeen stated, is only supporting, not directing, the government agenda to lay the right groundwork for free, fair, and credible elections. However, he then took credit for the absence of attacks on ready-made garment factories by observing that after the State of Emergency declaration he underscored to the Inspector General of Police that such attacks would be unacceptable.

#### Political Party Reaction

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15. (C) Mid-level Awami League officials told us they generally welcome Moeen's remarks, particularly his endorsement of Sheikh Mujib as the "father of the country." One claimed the party rank and file view the remarks as vindication of core Awami League positions, but said some senior officials are concerned about Moeen's evident political aspirations. He recalled party president Sheikh Hasina's recent statement in the U.S. that the military is determined to discredit all political parties, and concluded this meant Hasina knows the military wants her to retire from politics.

16. (C) Bangladesh Nationalist Party leaders and a senior

official of Jamaat Islami complained to us that Moeen's endorsement of Sheikh Mujib and his revival of the war criminals issue needlessly re-opened old political wounds and undercut the military's nationalist and nonpartisan credentials.

Comment

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17. (C) Moeen's speech has already generated widespread comment since it represents his latest and clearest statement of political interest. The Awami League's narrow focus on the speech's "positive" aspects is partly spin but also reflects its stubborn complacency that the Awami League is well positioned to benefit from the misfortunes of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. In general, Awami League leaders seem determined to downplay any political aspirations of the military while acknowledging that the military's role in government is growing and that General Moeen is reportedly interested in becoming president once the incumbent's term expires in September. In the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, there is a clear sense of doom that is unlikely to lift until the fate of Khaleda Zia and her sons -- exile or resurrection -- is finally resolved.

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